

Balance is essential

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Southern Utahns are clear about at least one thing: their air. That is, they want their air to be clear, free from large amounts of dust and pollution that make breathing difficult for some and, because of haze, hamper the views for all.

Nothing could have made that point more clear than the recent Vision Dixie process, in which one of the highest priorities stated by residents was air quality.

Another thing Southern Utahns are clear about is their love for power. That is, they have a high demand for the electricity that powers computers, air conditioners and televisions.

Those two priorities collide with the Toquop Energy Project. The project, a proposed 750-Megawatt coal-fired plant about 12 miles north of Mesquite, is being billed as one of the cleanest coal plants ever to be constructed in the United States. Its carbon dioxide emissions are expected to be far less than other plants. Toquop is expected to release only a small percentage of mercury into the air. And it is expected to use 80 percent less water than other plants. Based on a third-party report on emissions, Toquop would be far cleaner than other plants in the area, including the plant in the Moapa area in Nevada from which Interstate 15 motorists see large smoke plumes filling the air with pollution.

Project officials stress that other than the coldest days of the year; people won't be able to see anything coming from the stacks at Toquop. That is comforting, but a region used to officials from the government and elsewhere lying to them about emissions - specifically, from nuclear testing - has a right to be cynical.

A petition has been circulating urging Utah's lawmakers to pressure Nevada into blocking construction of the plant. We've seen Utah's lawmakers' effectiveness in the recent past with their successful cancellation of the Divine Strake non-nuclear bomb test at the Nevada Test Site.

Regardless of whom you believe - the project managers' insistence that the project is safe, or civic groups that say our air will be polluted if the plant is allowed to open - the issue shows how important it is that our region and nation develop a solid energy policy.

It's easy to say we should convert our energy sources to wind and solar power. Those are clean, renewable energies, and studies have shown that we have good sites within Southern Utah and Southern Nevada to generate power in such a way.

Unfortunately, current technologies don't allow for those methods to generate as much power as is needed. There also appears to be no private company ready to make such an investment in the area.

That doesn't mean those methods are bad ideas. The market just isn't prepared to provide power in that way yet.

It's important that we leave the door open for alternative energies.

Local governments could work together, under the Vision Dixie plan or in some other way, to provide incentives to bring entice a wind or solar company to build a plant here as a means of investing in the future.

Residents could do their part by taking steps to conserve electricity. Without that step, the coal-fired plant is really the only way to provide cost-efficient and water-efficient power to our fast-growing region.

Only time will tell if Toquop will be allowed. Protest if you want. Support it if you want.

But the discussions we're having because of the project are healthy. We need a more diversified power portfolio. We need to conserve energy.

Otherwise, we either won't have the electricity or the air quality that we desire.
